

A Writer at War – Vasily Grossman with the Red Army 1941–1945.
Edited and translated by Antony Beevor and Luba Vinogradova.
The Harvill Press 2005.

Ivan's War – The Red Army 1939–1945 by Catherine Merridale.
Faber and Faber 2005.

The Cold War meant that much of the bravery, heroics, brutality and self-sacrifice of the Red Army during the Second World War were not widely known in the West. But since the collapse of Communism more and more archive material has become available to historians enabling a much fuller picture of the Soviet Union at war than has hitherto been available.

A Writer at War details the extraordinary story of Vasily Grossman, a Jew, who spent three years on the Eastern Front with the Red Army as a correspondent for the Red Star newspaper, witnessing inter alia the siege of Stalingrad, the Kursk tank battle and the horror of the concentration camps of Majdanek and Treblinka. His essay *The Hell of Treblinka* was referred to at the Nuremberg trials and is considered one of the most important single pieces of Holocaust literature.

Ivan's War, based on reams of varied archive material, tells the true story of what Russians still call The Great Patriotic War. But it is a tale told not from the point of view of the famous generals of the Red Army but of its poor bloody infantry, expected to fight in horrible conditions, inadequately kitted out, against an enemy that considered them sub-human. Ivan was a brave soldier in the extreme, but he was also cruel, brutal and – in his mass rape of German women following the bringing of the war to German soil – a quite barbaric foe.

Both these books paint a full and gruesome picture of the Soviet Army at war, and act as a potent reminder that without it the British and American forces might not have destroyed Hitler in the way they did.

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